

Session 5 Guide
Deepening Practices and Questions
Chapter 4: The Evolutionary Perspective

This week focuses on **Chapter 4** of *A New Republic of the Heart*. As always, there are more questions here than you'll have time to discuss, so I suggest you select a manageable few to deeply consider, journal about and/or discuss.

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From previous chapters we have considered many things — what time it is on the planet, how hard it is for us to awaken from our collective trance, and our responsibilities to make a difference. And we have also opened up to and began to understand some of the implications of the profound, paradoxical, inherent, divine and elusive Wholeness that is the real nature of us and everything.

Now, in this chapter we step back in order to see wholeness and fragmentation with “evolutionary eyes”. We discover a perspective that sees beyond the frame of a human lifetime, comprehending “what’s happening” on multiple scales — comprehending the slow miraculous story that frames this moment — the story of evolution, cosmic, biological, cultural and noetic — and they are each composed of many more stories. These stories have unfolded over many simultaneous time scales. Not all of them move at the hyper speed of contemporary culture, or even cultural evolution. Some of them have arcs of hundreds of years, some thousands (or tens or hundreds of thousands) and some millions or many millions, and others only visible across several billions-of-years.

As these larger patterns reveal themselves, our eyes awaken in a variety of ways. We realize that we are a process, in play with other smaller and larger processes, and that all these processes are themselves evolving. Our very “way of seeing” itself shifts and transforms. Most critically, our new perspective illuminates “what really matters” in new ways — particularly the consequential roles we might have an opportunity to play in co-creating the future evolution of civilization, life, and the cosmos.

Deepening Questions:

1. At every level, from our species (and other species) to our planet to the universe itself, we can perceive—over eons of time—an arc of development from simpler, less conscious and cooperative life forms to more conscious, complex and cooperative ones. Although every epoch of evolution shows both advances and regressions, the larger picture shows this evolutionary arc taking place within human civilization. And at key moments in the process, evolutionary *emergence* has given birth to new dimensions of the process, some as consequential at the emergence of life, and of culture. “If you leave hydrogen and helium along long enough, they become oceans and seaweed and rivers and ants and antelope, and then they build cathedrals, write symphonies, put telescopes

into orbit, and wonder about the meaning of it all.” *Consider how this observation contributes to a more hopeful sense of how we might respond to our current predicament. How is this distinct from passive faith that “evolution will find a way”? How does that distinction feel when you try it on as a lens through which to look and feel?*

2. The appearance of humans, consciousness, and culture on Earth just 120,000 or so years ago has given birth to a whole inner universe of language, thought, and meaning—and has, in our own time, immeasurably speeded up the pace of change. *How might evolution itself evolve and change its trajectory in the near future—perhaps even within our own lifetimes? Please think of 3 plausible alternative scenarios. (If you think we can benefit from considering one or more of your alternatives with, please share on our Facebook group.)*
3. While biological evolution has been largely accepted among the more educated, the evolution of consciousness—and our *ability to influence* this evolution—are just beginning to be understood (and by a much smaller subgroup of the population). *We have been elaborating an evolutionary worldview. And yet events are moving fast, and elaborating the worldview, while noble and valuable, is not by itself sufficient. How might we further the adequacy, excellence, metabolization, and propagation of this worldview, and what new creative possibilities might this allow to unfold (see page 91)?*
4. *How might evolution’s method of “differentiation and integration” (pages 94–96) open up possibilities and opportunities that are not adequately accounted for by our pervasive conscious or unconscious (subtle nagging dread) expectations of unmitigated “doom”? Can you relate to this like a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy reframing? Can you breathe it? (Extra: See if it can shift your sense of ground and felt experience in your hara and feet.)*
5. It often takes extreme evolutionary tension to give rise to sudden spurts of dramatic progress (page 98). We appear to be entering one of those periods of rapid change. My friend Ed, who is a river guide, tells me that his guiding skill jumped two levels when he stopped looking at the rocks he wanted to avoid, and focused his attention on the path he wanted the boat to take. Ok, rapids ahead: this is the best argument against pessimistic depression. We owe it to the future to become healthy, happy and to affirm all that is good true and beautiful. *What are some of the consequential things you might be able to do, and that we might be able to do together, to serve the resurgent health of the whole? How can we make our patterns of thought and behavior “strange attractors” of a future we want to bring into being?*

Group Practice:

Begin your book group meeting with a reading (from this chapter or from another source) that evokes a felt sense of contact with the evolutionary impulse.

Then, sit in silence together, eyes closed, deepening into a felt experience of creative aliveness for ~3 minutes.

Then, if you are meeting in person or via a video link, open your eyes, and gaze for ~3 minutes into the eyes of one another, opening to the aliveness of each “next new now-moment” relaxing into how it is always-opening, and enjoying how it expresses itself in your book group partners.

Then, take turns “speaking as” the impulse of evolution itself, as you intuit it. As much as possible, build on whatever resonates in what others have said. Appreciate what resonates, and for the purpose of this exercise, refrain from pointing out what doesn’t. Allow a greater aliveness and intelligence to speak through you. If a new presence enters, and speaks through all of you, terrific! With everything you say and even in the way you listen to others, lean toward animating the deepest healthiest parts of you that express the harmonious whole compassionate generosity, aliveness, and intelligence of life and evolution, or divinity, if you will.

Personal Practice

1. In random moments throughout the day, at least for a moment, remember the radical “okayness” of existence, relax the chronic tendency to experience life from the conceptual mind, and allow yourself to enjoy each micro-moment of experience. To whatever degree you are able, inhale and exhale the living energy of existence, allowing it to refresh your being, and feel the inherent pleasurableness of existence.
2. Do another (very different, but complementary) practice this week, responding to the implications of Chapter 2’s discussion of activism. Reach out and do something (however small) that is practical and concrete to positively influence politics in the place where you live.

If you live outside the USA and would like to influence US politics (which are in crisis and influence the whole world) even though you can’t donate to candidates or parties, you can consider donating to US nonprofit organizations focused on the environment, civil liberties, gun control, indigenous communities, women’s rights, racial justice, and/or many other key issues.

If you are in the United States and you have no ready connection to how you can help, consider going to <https://postcardstovoters.org> and register. Do you know anyone whose vote might help make a difference but who might NOT vote? Reach out such people. See if you can get them to commit to voting formally on <https://iwillvote.com>. Make a bigger or more regular political donation than you otherwise would. In whatever ways are congruent for you, start doing something, moving your body through time and space, to make a

difference to our upcoming midterm elections. This will not only make a difference in the world, it will change your relationship to the larger issues we are discussing.